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CIA and KGB wage silent struggle for defectors

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ATHENS, Greece — There is a silent struggle going on here between the CIA and the KGB, with defectors as the prize. For Athens it's like old times, when wartime British agents kept bumping into Soviet and Nazi German spies.

Defection incidents that began in this bustling Mediterranean city have spread ripples far and wide. The latest intrigue involved the dramatic defection last month of Soviet embassy shipping attache Viktor Gundarev, 50, his son, Maxim, and a Soviet woman. The U.S. State Department said Mr. Gundarev was a KGB colonel.

A bit earlier, a senior member of a visiting Romanian trade delegation gave three colleagues the slip while visiting the Acropolis. Local reports said he was whisked away by CIA agents who were waiting at a pawn shop.

Last year Sergei Bokhan, a Soviet Embassy first secretary who said he was Soviet military intelligence (GRU) deputy station chief, defected to the United States.

The defections have wider significance for Western security, for they revealed what one authority called "previously unknown details of Soviet espionage activities in NATO countries."

Shortly after Mr. Gundarev's defection, former U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. John Bothwell, 59, was charged in London with making arrangements to pass secrets "useful to an enemy." Mr. Bothwell owned a villa in an Athens suburb, Vathy, where he lived six months a year.

Shortly after Mr. Bokhan's defection, the Kremlin recalled Soviet Ambassador Igor Andropov, son of the late Soviet leader and KGB chief, Yuri Andropov, to Moscow. Mr. Bokhan's family was prevented from joining him and was sent back to the Soviet Union under armed KGB guard.

Mr. Bokhan's revelations, in turn, led to the arrest by Greek police of Constantine Serepissios, 35, a navy officer who had access to classified NATO files, and two Greek civilians employed by ITT and Hewlett-Packard Co.

Press reports said Mr. Gundarev gave his former KGB colleagues the slip, defecting by way of a heavily guarded U.S. navy base at Nea Makri. Police said four Soviets who tried to keep him from defecting were outwitted by Mr. Gundarev, who was their boss.

The Soviets, including correspondents of the TASS news agency and the Izvestia newspaper, circled the downtown U.S. Embassy compound for hours in a car with its headlights switched off.

Arrested, they were found to have "two automatic pistols and hand grenades," police said. The four claimed they were searching for a tavern. Police released them after they claimed diplomatic immunity.

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